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ABSTRACT

The focus of this highly quantitative investigation is the analysis of the differences observed, both in methodological approach and in language choice in the classroom, during five years of classroom visitations. The study reflects information collected from two very different institutions with radically distinct populations: a rural setting with traditional students of a rural background with very limited ethnic diversity; and a city setting with a commuting population of low socio-economic level, ethnically diverse, non-traditional students. While differences in the setting and the student population could have been expected to have a major impact on the two topics under scrutiny, data shows that most of the basic divergences are based on the instructors' gender and secondarily their age. It is concluded that there are clear differences between genders in their approach to teaching and their choice of language to communicate and interact in the classroom environment. In general, women prefer more dialectic forms of interaction, and men tend to use more didactic strategies. A slight variation was also observed according to age: older instructors (over 60) favor didactic teaching strategies, use more formal language registers, and show restricted patterns of nonverbal communication which are closer to those generally observed in males. (Contains 13 references.) (KFT)

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GENDER-BASED APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LANGUAGE CHOICE IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT: AN ANALYSIS

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The focus of this investigation is the analysis of the differenc observed, both in methodological approach and in language choice in the classroom, during five years of classroom visitations. The study reflects information collected from two very different institutions with radically distinct populations: a) rural setting, traditional students of rural background, very limited ethnic diversity, and b) city setting, commuting population of low socio-economic level, a majority of non-traditional students, and wide ethnic variation.

While differences in setting and student population could have been expected to have a major impact on the two topics under scrutiny, our data shows that the most basic divergences are based on instructors' gender, and secondarily, their age.

Key words: Sociolinguistics, Language and Gender, Teaching, Classroom Talk Analysis

0. Introduction.

Communication is a process with no clear, defined boundaries. In and by itself it is essentially the process which takes place between people sharing ideas, feelings, etc. with others, and is therefore concerned not only with exchanging information, but also with how an individual produces and presents that information. (Hills 1986). This throws into sharp focus an intrinsic problem of human communication: the need to take a variety of factors into account for understanding and interpreting its messages such as speech characteristics, type of interaction, and coding patterns.

Already according to Rosseau, education[1], could be understood to be a communication process between society passing its knowledge and needs, and the individual; by the same parameters, learning was defined as a process of acquiring knowledge or changing attitudes, behavior or beliefs by contact with external events, in order for society to create "good citizens".

[1] "He, too, advocated the need for national education; without it there would be no means of making "good citizens". (Hills 1986, p. 4)

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If this is so, education and learning, like any other form of communication should be subject to be described on the basis of four elements: *input*, *coding*, *channels of communication*, and *output*. It is our intention, and the purpose of this investigation to demonstrate that education is a process which fulfills these four requirements, and that as such, it depends on a variety of factors which are responsible for the final format of its messages.

1. Background.

Society's knowledge and needs, as Rosseau clearly understood, would be the *input*. Particularly in the area of Foreign Language Instruction, the area targeted in this research, we only have to study the series of documents which have been produced as of late in several states under the general title of Foreign Languages, or World Languages, Standards Framework[2]. Clearly delineated in all of them, is the all-pervasive statement of the need for the creation of these standards to fulfill global market requirements and enhance students' employability. Only in very secondary terms, the idea of foreign language education as a means of betterment of the individual is explored. The next element, *coding*, is, therefore, the task undertaken by instructors passing on to students that knowledge. They do so through *channels of communication* which can be influenced by a wide series of factors due to which the *output* can be considerably different from the input. This is the general representation of education as a whole; let us now move to its particulars, mainly the units of interaction.

The most representative unit of communication in education and learning is a lesson. (Edwards and Furlong 1978). We may safely assume that a lesson naturally involves the verbal exposition of facts and skills, since in our culture, and especially in institutions of higher education, we place much more emphasis on verbal interaction than on the more visual and physically active forms of learning which are available nowadays.

Unlike in other type of interactions, "inside the classroom, it is one of the functions of the teacher to choose the topic, decide how it will be subdivided into smaller units and cope with disgressions and misunderstandings." (Green and Wallat 1981, p. 96). We may claim that what they are involved in is not a conversation. We could even claim that it is a situation which resembles public events where there is an audience and a single performer much more than it resembles conversation, since for much of the time in classrooms the prevailing verbal format is that something is being said which demands the attention of all. (Edwards and Westgate 1987). This verbal format can be summarized as "listen".

Such centralized communication is a remarkable achievement which imposes a heavy strain on the instructor who, all too frequently, is the only person responsible for

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[2] See the *Massachusetts Standards for World Languages Framework*, or the 1999 draft of the *California Foreign Language Curriculum Framework K-12* in reference to this issue.

the success of the interaction. It also seems to be a persistent fact despite the myriad of "innovative" methodological approaches geared towards the achievement of true communication. (Fidalgo 1996). These very particular characteristics are what makes classrooms so distinctive as settings for talk, and an excellent source of data on how orderly interaction is achieved and maintained.

The same process we have described above as a central communication system, is also transactional: when instructors communicate with students, they usually have a purpose in mind. Whenever they happen to fail to achieve their purpose, they automatically reassess their own communication behavior searching for that which is more appropriate for the kind of response they are trying to elicit from their students, and they immediately formulate a new set of interactional strategies. (Kocoglu 1997). The possible range of variations within this process, as it can be observed in classroom instruction at the university level, is the main focus of this study.

2. Methodology.

Traditional analysis of classroom talk have followed broadly behaviorist approaches to systematic observation, the criteria being reduced to an observable single model of verbal interaction based on stimulus-response. (Young 1992). This approach ignored a very important factor in communication: the intentions and emotions of the actors. Systematic studies, however, can also include the use of videotape recording to integrate nonverbal cues with meaning, revealing information that captures more closely the essence of the interactions. (Hammersley 1990). This study combines systematic observation to extract the essential features which depict verbal patterns with both videotape recording and training in simultaneous interpretation of nonverbal communication.

2.1. Verbal behavior.

As we mentioned earlier, a lesson can be treated as a convenient, if not linguistic, unit--a speech event with clear boundaries, with beginning and end. As a model of "[...] talk in power-marked settings like courtrooms and classrooms, where the power difference can be identified, clearly and in detail in how that talk is organized." (Hustler and Payne 1982, p. 45), it also lends itself to further subdivisions into a hierarchy of verbal transactional exchanges which Edwards (1976), Edwards and Furlong (1978) and Edwards and Westgate (1987) categorized as *moves*, *sequences* and *acts*. For reasons of limited space, the following is a simpler, modified version:

a. *Moves* are the verbal actions which are recognized by the actors as being significant structural indicators. As such, they mark the beginning and end of the different activities selected for a teaching unit, and they show the relationship between what is said and what is done, and they comprise:

a.1. *structuring moves*, or utterances which set the stage for subsequent behavior by indicating what the next classroom activity is going to be;

a.2. *framing moves*, or those which announce that a particular activity has ended;
a.3. *focussing moves*, or those which prepare students for the upcoming activity.

b. *Sequences* are the verbal actions which are recognized by the actors as interaction sequential organizers. As interaction, and not as merely talk organizers, they reflect tasks realized by both parties. Therefore, on the side of the instructor, the possible actions include:

b.1. *giving directions* and information through metastements[3];
b.2. *eliciting* responses;
b.3. *offering cues* when answers are not forthcoming;
b.4. *nominating* somebody to speak;
b.5. *accepting* what is relevant;
b.6. *evaluating* its contents.

On the students' side[4] they include: a) bidding for attention; b) acknowledging that they were paying attention; c) replying, and d) reacting.

c. *Acts* are coded as actions which contribute to the warming/cooling of the classroom climate by making it more or less formal, and all of them can appear in each sequence. They include:

c.1. *accepting* what has been said;
c.2. *amplifying* the response;
c.3. *eliciting* responses;
c.4. *responding* to students' expressions;
c.5. *initiating* interaction;
c.6. *directing* interaction;
c.7. *correcting* outcomes.

Acts and Sequences are the main categories for the classification of instructors as *didactic*: their classes focus mainly on lecturing, a teacher-centered approach, or *dialectic:* their classes focus more on interaction, a student-centered approach. They also are the first two of the four parameters used in this investigation.

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[3] "Metastements are instructors' statements to monitor the talk by talking about it, such as in giving instructions and directions to the class. Almost all of them are made by the instructors, and they are: a) attracting attention; b) controlling the amount and distribution of talk; c) specifying the topic; d) checking and confirming understanding; e) correcting and editing what is said; and f) summarizing. (Edwards and Furlong 1978, p. 20.)

[4] We decided not to expand on this topic since the focus of the analysis is the person who organizes the interaction, the instructor.

2.2. Nonverbal Behavior.

In regards to verbal expression, nobody can deny that in a classroom environment, most of the time information is processed through verbal exchanges. However, in instructors' interaction with students, both one-to-one situations, small groups and large groups, there is much information being transferred which, similarly to the parameters chosen for verbal communication, does not pertain to the subject content of the material. (Hills 1986). As a teacher enters a classroom, and therefore, into the sensory range of the students, s/he initiates communication, frequently before saying a word. In instructor-students' interaction, there is a whole range of expressions and attitudes that are not overtly manifested through verbal communication and which have as much impact on the outcome. (Neill 1991). They can support or deny verbal communication, replace verbal communication, or show emotions and attitudes. The classification that Hurt, Scott and McCroskey (1978) present of the classical variables of nonverbal communication capable of stimulating meaning[5] in other persons is interpreted in this study as follows:

a) *use of space* in the classroom: moving around the class as opposed to staying up front;
b) *touch*: patting students' shoulders; touching their heads;
c) *body movement* and gestures: pointing, smiling, shaking head;
d) *use of time*: showing flexibility with students' pace;
e) *vocal behavior* (use and quality of voice): warm, gentle, as opposed to distant and cool;
f) *eye behavior*: looking directly at individuals;
g) *objects* in the classroom: bringing objects that support teaching.

Nonverbal behavior accounts for a type of instruction which relies mainly on interaction and exchange, and seeks other forms of communication to reinforce this message.

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[5] "The following continuum for nonverbal gestures in the teaching/learning situation, ranges from those which are supportive to those which are unsupportive:

a. Enthusiastic/Openly Supportive: qualities of unusual enthusiasm, warmth, encouragement or emotional support for students or situations.
b. Receptive/Helpful: qualities of attentiveness, patience, willingness to listen, acceptance or approval; a responsiveness to students or situations implying receptiveness of expressed feelings, needs or problems.
c. Clarifying/Directive: qualities of clarification, elaboration, direction or guidance.
d. Neutral: qualities of little or no supportive or unsupportive effect.
e. Avoidance/Insecurity: qualities of avoidance, insecurity, insensitivity, impatience, ignorance or disruption to students or situations.
f. Inattentive: qualities of inattentiveness, preoccupation, aparent disinterest; an unwillingness to engage students or situations.
g. Disapproval: qualities of disapproval, dissatisfaction, discouragement or negative overtones to students or situations. (Victoria, 1971)". (Hills 1986, p. 51.)

2.3. Linguistic Behavior.

Although we set out initially to interpret classroom communication behavior within the two parameters mentioned above, it soon became obvious that there was a range of variables which was not taken into account by them. Not surprisingly, these variables refer exclusively to the use of the target language, Spanish in this particular case, and how this language is used for teaching purposes. That range comprises the following:

a. *informal register*: *tú* as opposed to *usted*;
b. *tag questions*;
c. *the amount of time* Spanish is used for instruction;
d. *use of slang* terms;
e. *code-switching* English/Spanish (at the sentence level);
f. *code-mixing* English/Spanish (intrasentence);
g. *emotional language*: praise, enthusiasm, disapproval.

This third category of linguistic behavior reinforces the observations realized by the previous two since it bridges the relationship between verbal and nonverbal communication. It also provides basic information and data for the determination of the instructors' teaching methodology and language choice.

3. The Study.

Each institution is represented by nine instructors, five females and four males, with a total of eighteen individuals. These numbers account for the totality of teaching members in each department within the rank of faculty, but do not include teaching assistants. All classes observed belong to the lower-level sequence, the first four semesters of college Spanish. Members of institution A--rural setting, traditional students of rural background, and very limited ethnic diversity—are represented by the letter A followed by a number from 1 to 9. Members of institution B—city setting, commuting population of non-traditional and low socio-economic level, and wide ethnic variation—are represented by the letter B, also followed by numbers from 1 to 9.

The following table provides relevant information about background characteristics of the subjects of this study within the categories of sex, age, nationality, academic qualifications and teaching experience, factors which may have an influence in the way they view and practice teaching.

Table 1. Background characteristics of the instructors.

	Gender	Age	Nationality	Qualifications	Experience
A1	Female	30s	N. America	MA	5 years
A2	Female	40s	Ecuador	MA	12 years
A3	Male	60s	N. America	Ph.D	31 years

A4	Female	60s	N. America	Ph.D	29 years
A5	Male	40s	Peru	Ph.D	13 years
A6	Female	30s	Spain	Ph.D	6 years
A7	Female	30s	N. America	Ph.D	3 years
A8	Male	30s	N. America	MA	7 years
A9	Male	50s	N. America	MA	17 years
B1	Female	30s	N. America	Ph.D	2 years
B2	Female	30s	Spain	Ph.D	9 years
B3	Male	30s	N. America	MA	5 years
B4	Female	60s	N. America	Ph.D	27 years
B5	Male	50s	N. America	MA	19 years
B6	Male	40s	P. Rico	Ph.D	17 years
B7	Female	50s	Argentina	Ph.D	21 years
B8	Male	40s	N. America	MA	16 years
B9	Female	50s	Colombia	Ph.D	22 years

A comparison of both institutions show a clear balance of average medium values:

Table 2. A comparison of both institutions.

	Institution A	Institution B
Gender	5F / 4M	5F / 4M
Age	41 years	43 years
Nationality	6 N. A / 3 Foreign	5 N. A. / 4 Foreign
Qualifications	4 MA / 5 Ph.D	3 MA / 6 Ph.D
Experience	13.6 years	15.3 years

Table 3 represents how each individual organizes and directs classroom activities in *sequences*, the structures which are recognized by the speakers as interaction sequential organizers. The classification "+ or –" for each sequence indicates if the instructor does each of the possible sequences most of the time, more than 50% of the time, or just occasionally, less than 50% of the time.

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Table 3. Verbal behavior. Sequences.

Gender	Gives directions	Elicits responses	Offers cues	Nominates speaker	Accepts relev info	Evaluates contents
A1 F	+	+	+	+	+	-
A2 F	+	+	+	+	+	+
A3 M	+	-	-	+	-	-
A4 F	+	+	-	+	-	+
A5 M	+	-	-	+	-	+
A6 F	+	+	+	+	+	+
A7 F	+	+	+	+	+	+
A8 M	+	+	-	+	+	-
A9 M	+	-	-	+	-	+
B1 F	+	+	+	-	+	+
B2 F	+	+	+	+	+	+
B3 M	+	-	+	-	+	-
B4 F	+	-	-	+	+	+
B5 M	+	-	-	-	-	-
B6 M	+	+	+	+	+	+
B7 F	+	+	-	+	+	+
B8 M	+	-	+	+	-	+
B9 F	+	-	-	+	-	+

In the first sequence, both institutions have an overwhelmingly positive result: both males and females regularly practice *giving directions*. In the second, there is a slight variation in the number of female--5 in A, and 3 in --which *elicit responses* as opposed to only one male in each institution who do so. In number three, four females from institution A *offer cues*, and none of the males, while in B two females and three males do so. Sequence number four shows that all individuals in A *nominate the speaker* while in B one female and two males do not. Number five, *accepting relevant information from students*, is done by the same number of females in both institutions--four to one--and by one male in institution A and two in B. Finally, sequence number six, has similar results in both places: four females in A and five in B *evaluate contents*, while only two males do the same in each institution.

The total results in this classification report that females from both institutions practiced a total of fifty sequences compared to only twenty five practiced by males. These numbers point out unequivocally to the fact that women are more dialectic (Casanave and Yamashiro 1996), and interaction oriented than their male counterparts, who seem to prefer the lecturing, instructor-oriented format characteristic of the didactic instructor.

The next table, number 4, reflects the occurrence per individual of the second category of verbal behavior--*Acts*. As we mentioned before, they refer to those actions which contribute to the cooling or warming of the instructional environment by making it more relaxed or more formal.

In combination with sequences, acts will report on the teaching orientation of each gender. Similarly to table 3, the presence of "+ or –" for each act indicates if the instructor does each of the possible acts most of the time, more than 50% of the time, or just occasionally, less than 50% of the time.

Table 4. Verbal behavior. Acts.

Gender	Accepts responses	Amplifies responses	Elicits responses	Responds to students	Initiates interaction	Directs interaction	Corrects outcomes
A1 F	+	+	-	+	+	-	-
A2 F	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
A3 M	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
A4 F	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
A5 M	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
A6 F	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
A7 F	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
A8 M	-	-	+	+	+	+	-
A9 M	+	-	+	-	+	+	+
B1 F	+	-	+	+	+	+	-
B2 F	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
B3 M	-	-	-	-	+	+	+
B4 F	+	+	-	-	+	+	+
B5 M	-	+	+	-	+	+	+
B6 M	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
B7 F	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

B8 M	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
B9 F	-	+	+	-	+	+	+

Numbers for the first act show exactly the same result in both institutions: four females and one male regularly *accept students' responses*. In the second, while the number of females who *amplify responses*, four, is exactly the same in both institutions, there is a two-two split between the males of institution B which does not happen in institution A where all males practice this act. In number three, four females and three males from each institution *elicits responses* while only one female and one male do not. Act number four shows that only one male in institution A does not generally *respond to students' expressions*. Number five, *initiating interaction*, is done by all males and females in both institutions. In number six only two females from institution A do not *direct the interaction* while all males and females from institution B do; and finally, act number seven shows some variation, with two females and one male from institution A who do not *correct outcomes* as opposed to only one female from institution B.

The total results in this classification report that although numbers in this category are slightly balanced than in the category of sequences—fifty five acts done by females and thirty eight done by males—they still reflect a difference which suggests that women are more dialectic and interaction oriented than their male counterparts.

It is quite interesting to observe those acts which reflect major differences between the behavior of males and females. *Accepting responses, amplifying responses, directing interaction and correcting outcomes* are values which also correspond to formats of politeness and social behavior. The first two correspond to what could be called the traditionally-based social understanding of women being more polite and responsive to others (Holmes 1995); the last two represent patterns of interaction which could be interpreted as more agressive and more representative of traditional male behavior.

Table 5 reflects the use of those expressions which are not overtly manifested through verbal communication. Nevertheless, they have as much impact on the outcome of the interaction since they support or deny verbal communication as well as show emotions and attitudes. Same as in previous tables, the presence of "+ or –" for each category indicates if the instructor practices each of them most of the time, more than 50% of the time, or just occasionally, less than 50% of the time.

Table 5. Nonverbal behavior.

Gender	Moves in class	Touch	Body movement	Time tolerance	Vocal warmth	Eye contact	Use of objects
A1 F	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
A2 F	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

A3 M	-	-	+	-	-	+	-
A4 F	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
A5 M	+	-	-	-	-	+	-
A6 F	+	+	+	-	+	+	-
A7 F	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
A8 M	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
A9 M	-	-	+	-	-	+	-
B1 F	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
B2 F	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
B3 M	+	-	+	-	-	+	-
B4 F	-	+	+	+	+	+	-
B5 M	-	-	+	+	-	+	-
B6 M	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
B7 F	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
B8 M	+	-	-	-	+	+	+
B9 F	-	-	+	-	+	+	-

Results from this table do not need much comment. Men do not touch, move little around the students, very few use their voices to warm up the classroom environment, and on the whole, thay have little tolerance with students' learning pace. Once again, the overwhelming difference of fifty five instances of nonverbal communication practiced regularly by women from both institutions versus the twenty four practiced by men corroborates, and accentuates the findings extracted in all previous categories.

The next and final table, number 6, reflects the patterns of linguistic behavior of the subjects of study using the same parameters as above.

Table 6. Linguistic Behavior.

Gender	Informal register	Tag questions	Use of Spanish	Use of slang	Code switching	Code mixing
A1 F	+	+	+	+	+	-
A2 F	+	+	+	+	+	+

A3 M	-	-	-	-	-	+
A4 F	-	+	-	-	+	-
A5 M	-	-	+	-	-	-
A6 F	+	+	+	+	+	-
A7 F	+	+	+	+	-	+
A8 M	+	+	+	+	+	+
A9 M	-	-	-	-	+	+
B1 F	+	+	+	+	-	+
B2 F	+	+	+	+	+	+
B3 M	+	-	+	+	+	+
B4 F	-	+	-	+	+	-
B5 M	-	-	+	-	-	+
B6 M	-	+	+	+	+	+
B7 F	+	+	+	+	+	+
B8 M	-	-	+	-	+	-
B9 F	+	+	+	-	+	-

A similar situation is observed in table 6. In the last category utilized for this study, and which includes all those variables referred exclusively to the extent and the format of use of Spanish in the classroom, results are equally unequivocal. Women use the informal register more regularly, they use question tags to elicit and reinforce students cooperation, they use the target language to a larger extent, present more familiar types of language, and they favor understanding by either switching or mixing codes when the circumstances make it possible and advisable.

4. Conclusion.

In sum, the data collected and analyzed in this study show that there are clear differences between genders in their approach to teaching and their choice of language to communicate and interact in the classroom environment. All the categories analyzed reported variations along the same lines: women prefer more dialectic types of interaction, and men tend to use more didactic strategies. A slight variation was also observed according to age: older instructors, over sixty and independently of their gender, favor didactic teaching strategies, use more formal language registers, and show

restricted patterns of nonverbal communication which are closer to those generally observed in males.

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